Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem

8 | 2001
Varia

Czernowitz revisited

Florence Heymann

OpenEdition Journals

Electronic version
URL: http://journals.openedition.org/bcrfj/1942
ISSN: 2075-5287

Publisher
Centre de recherche français de Jérusalem

Printed version
Date of publication: 30 March 2001
Number of pages: 121-134

Electronic reference
Florence Heymann, « Czernowitz revisited », *Bulletin du Centre de recherche français à Jérusalem* [Online], 8 | 2001, Online since 11 March 2008, connection on 01 May 2019. URL : http://journals.openedition.org/bcrfj/1942

Bulletin du CRFJ, printemps 2001, numéro 8

Czernowitz revisited

The anthropological and historical study I had been working on for the last several years on Bukovina (Austro Hungarian, then Romanian between the two World Wars and today in the Ukraine) – was nearing completion. At that point I felt I could not finish writing without actually visiting the places that I was describing through the memories of others, and which I was also the cradle of part of my family.
Czernowitz, notably the birthplace of Paul Celan and Rose Auslander, was predominantly Jewish during the inter-war period. It was a symbol of the coming together of two Europes – East and West. By cross comparison of source material, the life stories of the city's inhabitants, now living all over the world but many of whom are in Israël, and the archives which today are accessible, I primarily focused on the constructions of memory in its relationship to history, and the forging of identifies. In November 1999, Tel Aviv University organized a conference on "Czernowitz as a Paradigm. Cultural Pluralism and the Issue of Nationalities". While at this conference I met an American couple, both of whom are university researchers: Marianne Hirsch and her husband Leo Spitzer. Marianne, whose parents came from Czernowitz works on topics similar to mine. She told me about her plans to visit Bukovina in the spring of 2000. She was planning to go with her husband and a cousin, David Kessler, whose parents are also from that area. Marianne invited me to join them. This is how the trip came to be, and the extracts below are from the travel diary I kept.

Monday, July 3, 2000

Departure from Jerusalem. An oppressive, humid heat wave has blanketed the city. In front of the Prime Minister's residence, demonstrators are holding banners: "The Jordan Valley is Israeli territory". The ultra-orthodox are hot too. Their black hats pushed back off their foreheads.
The air-conditioning in the taxi taking me to the airport is noisy but doesn't help much. The driver wants to know where I am going: to the Ukraine! At least it will be cool there! I answer politely, but in fact I really have no idea what to expect.
In the Lufthansa Airbus to Frankfurt, I am seated next to a Japanese man who does not open his mouth for the whole 4-hour journey. Impassive, his expression does not budge for the duration for of the trip. He never speaks to me, not even when forty minutes before touchdown, the pilot announces that there is turbulence and the flight starts to be very rocky. The plane shakes. Everyone freezes in their seats. The anxiety that precedes panic fills the plane. Some passengers feel sick. The stewardesses lose some of their calm and collected behavior. But my Japanese seatmate, very Zen, remains unruffled.
Not at all an enthusiast of air travel, I am convinced this is the end. My anxiety doubles and I wonder whether I really needed to make this trip. Do I have to die for Czernowitz? The plane is buffeted more violently, there are strange noises, things falling down. Twenty minutes, twenty long minutes. Then suddenly – calm. We start breathing easier. The pilot reassures us. He explains that we were in the middle of a violent storm above Austria. Haider! Haider! The end of the trip is uneventful. I have no regrets about leaving my taciturn seatmate and I go to my hotel located in the airport. I make a call to Jerusalem. Once again I am at peace with the world. Tomorrow the adventure begins.

Tuesday, July 4

The sky is leaden. The weather report says there is a low-pressure zone over Poland. I hope that the flight will be less rocky than last night's. I wander around the Duty Free buying a few presents for the people I will meet there. I see Marianne Hirsch, her husband and then their cousin David Kessler. They are buying about the same things as I am. Here we are on the Ukrainian airlines plane. First good news: it's a practically new Boeing 737. There is a lot of English being spoken. The Americans want to trace their roots. The passengers don't make the sign of the cross before take off. There are no chickens in the rafters and the stewardesses are as charming as the ones you find on the best international carriers. For the moment, the stories I've heard don't seem to jibe.

In comparison to last night's flight, this one is perfect. Not the slightest quiver. I leaf through a Kiev magazine in English. The local news doesn't really inspire me. A thick supplement deals with economy and business. There's an interesting article however on the problem of Ukrainian women used as prostitutes abroad.

Touchdown at Lvov. Hello, Ukraine. Before we are allowed to leave the plane, a policeman checks our passports and visas. The shuttle taking us from the plane to the airport seems very Eastern European to me; but not so different from the ones at Lod ten or fifteen years ago. We get to the old-fashioned airport building where passengers line up to buy mandatory health insurance. They had done things right at the Ukrainian embassy in Tel Aviv because I already had a document like this. I need to fill out a customs declaration. I write down the amount of money I am carrying with me, 1 000 dollars. I find out later that I was lucky since that is the maximum amount of money you are allowed to bring in without making a special declaration, which is more problematic. You also have to declare your valuables, camera, video, etc. Following the advice of "specialists" to Eastern countries. I hadn't taken any jewelry. I only had my wedding ring, for decorum's sake. The customs officer asks me whether I have any other gold aside from my ring. Without encountering any other problems I leave
the hall where a porter rushes to take my suitcase to carry it outside. He obviously expects a tip but I can't find my dollar bills in low denominations. I am not very organized and I didn't know the codes and customs yet. I wait for Marianne, Leo and David to leave. They come a few minutes later. Mikhaijlo, our driver, is waiting for us. The car is brand new, a Mazda 626 station wagon with air conditioning. The trip to the hotel is very short because the airport is practically in the city.

After checking into our rooms in Hotel Dniester, we head out for a walk. The city is beautiful but the upkeep is poor. We walk for a long time. A baroque catholic church is being repaired. I am struck by how fervently the people worship. In Western Europe we are not used to seeing ecstatic prayers by men and women on their knees, immobile for hours at a time, their eyes fixed on the pictures of saints in the chapel, crossing themselves every few minutes. After we leave we have a glass of the excellent local beer in a cafe on a small square and then start out for the old quarter of Lvov-Lemberg.

We stop at the Grand Hotel, where I had thought of staying. Marianne had stayed at the Dniester when she came two years ago and was very happy with it, and preferred not to push her luck. We ate in the hotel. Only two other tables were taken. A couple, a very elegant man in his fifties and a ravishing, very young woman in an evening gown, a black stole and heavy jewelry. Because it is the beginning of the trip I am astonished at this beauty and elegance. I would later realize that this is the norm, including in Czernowitz. Young women are often extremely beautiful, and starting towards the end of the afternoon wear very dressy outfits, something that is no longer fashionable elsewhere. A pianist begins to play classical music and jazz. The atmosphere is very pleasant. I feel a little bit "back home": it is neither too hot nor too cold, and the food is excellent. Moldavian wine is delicious and the bill, although the

highest we ever paid during our entire trip, attained the astronomical sum of twenty four dollars for the four of us, about one hundred and twenty Hryvnias in the local currency. We take a taxi back to the hotel. It isn't far but it is dark, and we would have needed to walk through a deserted park to get back. The taxi wants to drive right up to the hotel but the doorman signals him to back up. The area is surrounded by policemen. An official Polish delegation is arriving. The Soviet Union suddenly seems very nearby. He deposits us behind the hotel. A heavy downpour starts just as we get out and by the time we get around the front we are drenched. I'm sure I will sleep well. I'm happy I finally decided to make this trip.

Wednesday, July 5

I did indeed sleep well. A deep sleep. On TV there are ten or so Ukrainian, Russian, and German channels, and TV5. I took a bath. The water runs a little slowly but it is hot. David Kessler tells me later that he only has a shower. The laundry bag is still marked "Intourist USSR Company for Foreign Travel".

After a copious breakfast with a variety of dishes we ask for maps of the city at the reception desk. We had not yet realized what a rare and precious commodity these are. In Czernowitz we needed all the patience we could muster to get one, and a very basic one at that, and we ended up using maps of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and from the Romanian period. The young woman at the travel agency in the hotel lobby marks the location of a synagogue that still operates, the cemetery, the ghetto and the monument to the 130,800 Jewish victims of the ghetto. We start out. We walk a lot. The city is full of superb buildings that have not been renovated since the war. The country is too poor for renovations apparently (on this point as well we would find out later that the situation is different for Czernowitz; since Marianne's last visit two years ago, many buildings have been renovated, at times to the detriment of historical inscriptions, such as a Jewish building which bore the inscription in Hebrew mahsikei Shabbat[1] (which has been removed).

We get to the synagogue. An Ukrainian tells us that it is closed and we can't visit it, but we plead and one of the guards opens the door. Inside, the building is very interesting. The walls are dovered with frescos depicting scenes of Jerusalem. The ceiling is also extremely ornate, with leaf motifs of lulavim and etrogim[2], painted in a naif styleL The women's section, ezrat nashim, looks like the balcony of a theater, onltwo levels. The outside of the building is still in disrepair. The guard tells us that there is a minyan[3] twice a day. We leave the synagogue and head for the cemetery. It is enormous and has a Jewish section way in the back. Many trees, but the tombstones are recent. Aside from a Magen David[4] instead of a cross, they are exactly like Ukrainian tombstones. Everything is written in Cyrillic, with the exception of a few traditional ones with inscriptions in Hebrew. I decide to use the ladies' room at the entrance to the cemetery. An unpleasant experience. The first of in long series of such experiences in public facilities.

We take a taxi back downtown. We have lunch on the market square. David and I visit the monument commemorating the ghetto. A menorah[5] in cast iron, a text in Ukrainian carved into black marble. On the ground, a text from Ezekiel in Hebrew and Ukrainian.

We get back to the hotel at five o'clock, a little sweaty. It is very humid and it looks like a storm is brewing as it did yesterday at the same time. I meet Marianne and Leo at the bar at six. They are working on a book about the second generation of Czernowitzians. Marianne

---

[1] *Those who observe the* Sabbath.

[2] Lulavim *are palm branches and* etrogim *are citrons, species used during the holiday of* Sukkot*, the Feast of Booths in the autumn.*

[3] *A group of ten men for a prayer service.*

[4] *Star of David*

[5] *Candle stand with seven branches.*

and Leo interview me over a glass of good wine, a slightly chilled local Merlot. We get along very well together. We go out to have dinner in town. I announce that they will be my guests for a "feast" at the George. We take a taxi back to the hotel afterwards. Tonight we plan to go to bed early because tomorrow at eight we are leaving for Czernowitz, a trip that will take 6 hours to cover roughly 280 km. We plan two stops. The first is in the home town of David's mother, Zuravne. and the second at Stanislavov, today Ivano-Frankivsk, a small town where my grandmother was born.

Thursday, July 6

The hotel wake up call is for six o'clock but I am up a good half an hour before it rings. Our driver is there punctually at seven o'clock.

We leave Lvov and head for Zuravne. The Ukrainian countryside. Galicia. The landscapes are magnificent and the houses are neat and tidy. There is not much traffic, there are carts drawn by horses, geese, cows resting along the road, and on the sides, a lot of run-over dogs. The countryside is truly splendid. At the top of the electricity poles there are stork nests with their inhabitants.

We get to the tiny village of Zuravne. We look for the Jewish cemetery. We ask the farmers for directions. Behind the last houses in the village is a field. A very old woman, with a windburned face and a scarf tied around her head is letting a few sheep graze. Pieces of very old tombstones are scattered everywhere. We have found the cemetery, or rather what is left of it. The carved tombstones were all taken by the Soviets, the woman explains, to build a school. It's always someone else's fault.

Our driver calls out: "Here we are, Bukovina!" The landscape has slowly shifted and we find ourselves in the green Bukovina, the Bukovina of Rose Auslander, Grime Mutter Bukowine Schmetterlingege im Haare: "Green mother, Bukovina, with butterflies in her hair/ Drink says the sun, the red milk of the melons/ the white milk of the corn. I've put sugar in it, purple pine cones/ wings of air, birds and leaves/ and the Carpathians/ like a father who wants to carry you on his back/ four languages/ songs in four languages/ people who understand each other."

At one point, the driver makes a U turn. We are a little surprised. He wants to have us stop at a monument to the Jewish victims of Kolomea, assassinated by the Nazis. If my memory is correct, the local farmers gave a helping hand. It's clear for the driver that we are doing a Jewish tour.

Finally we get to Czernowitz: "Tchernivtsi" announces the large sign in white Cyrillic letters on the blue gate at the entrance to the town. I feel like I am floating. Through the windows of the car I film the whole route that I have traced so often on maps of the town: crossing the Prut, the train station, the route up to the Ringplatz, taking the Eisenberg-Hauptstrasse, Rathausstrasse, Siebenburger-Strasse, the Volksgarten, then the Soviet suburbs where Cheremosh is located.

For someone who speaks French, the name fits the town like a glove. The hotel is indeed expensive and ugly. During the Soviet era, the Intourist hotel was the only place where foreigners were allowed to stay. The building is ten stories high, and dates back to the 1980s. The gigantic entrance, in the style of the Orsay train station, is much less esthetic, and is made of cement and glass. At the check in desk, blond, plump women give us a fairly lukewarm reception. A reminder of the former USSR. The room is extremely large. It has everything you might need, more maybe, but everything is sinister, in particular the view

It really makes no difference, of course. A half an hour later, in the lobby, I meet David who is talking with an Israeli couple from Holon. The night before there had been a group of sixty Israelis at the hotel. The man was born in the city and the woman was born in Galicia and lived in Paris. She speaks with me in French. They complain about almost everything. Clearly we have not had the same experiences. "Can you imagine? There is no hot water before 6

p.m.!" They didn't know and neither did we, that we had been very lucky. We were not to have a drop of hot water for the duration of our stay.
Marianne and Leo meet us. We head out to visit Rosa Roth- Zuckerman, a cousin of Marianne's and almost the last Czernowitizian from the interwar period. She lives on the Austrians' Pardinigasse, a small street in the center of the city that has scarcely changed since the Empire. Rosa is an amazing 91 year old. Her son arrives a few minutes later. We spend two hours talking, three-quarters of the time in German, the rest in English. Her library contains all the books dealing directly or indirectly with Czemowitz, Paul Celan and Rose Auslander. The biography of Celan by Halien was translated into Japanese. The translator carefully underlined all the passages that mention Rosa.
She tells me she is sure she remembers the Herschmann family, my family; "they were well known in Czernowitz" she says. I take some pictures of her, her library and her collection of portraits of Franz-Joseph and the Empress Sissi.
We leave and walk pass the Temple, or rather its bizarre reincarnation as a movie house, casino and billiard ball. The inhabitants of Tchernivistsi still call it the Kinagoga. Inside, the toilets in the basement are another type of unforgettable experience. We walk to Elisabethplatz, also known as Theaterplatz, a long square with the theater at one end, and on the right hand side, the building that housed the Judische Haus.
The theater, built by the Viennese architects Hellmer and Fellmen, as was probably the theater in Lvov because they are practically alike, is not an imposing or large building. The proportions are classic and almost ethereal. The statue in the center of the flowerbed exemplifies the ethnic and cultural changes in the city. The statue of Schiller, replaced by Eminescu is today Olga Kobylanskaya, the Ukranian poetesse carved in black marble. The locals have clearly forgotten, or never knew that before writing in her native language, she wrote her first texts in German, the language of culture. The light of the setting sun caresses the stucco of the facades.
We eat dinner in a Ukrainian Hutsul tavern. The Hutsuls, a Carpathian mountain folk, were one of the ethnic groups in the city in the interwar period. They were famous for their horses. The waiters are dressed in traditional costumes, with tunics and white trousers decorated with multicolored embroidery where red dominates. The restaurant is located at the beginning of Herrengasse, where fine ladies and gentlemen of the day used to promenade, and coffee houses, the Rapeanu, the Habsbourg, and others, lined the street.
The Cheremost nightlife is at its peak. The golden youth of Czernowitz party every night until the wee hours. The discotheque is full to brimming although the prices appear to be beyond the reach of the ordinary citizen. Is this new generation, these incredibly elegant and made-up young women, dancing to the tunes of the latest American hit parade, to become the new middle class of the city?
The lobby of the hotel is crowded at all times with people waiting. apparently for someone or something. Bouncers, KGB style, however protectively guard the passage from the public area to the upper floors where the rooms are.
Tomorrow morning, we leave the hotel at 8:30 for an extensive tour of the city. I feel that I am vicariously experiencing how it feels to lose my house, to have my country occupied, to leave the dead without tombstones or commemoration. Soon I am going to come in contact with the most concrete parts of my past: the house, the school, the familiar places, a lost, uprooted childhood, and I know that this time, there is no turning back. The framework has been dictated by the end of my research.

Friday, July 7

Last night, before I fell asleep, I had time to make a list of the streets and places I want to film. I will also need to locate the sole operating synagogue out of the 63 that used to exist in

the city. I realize that I was so concerned with safety issues that I didn't prepare for this trip well enough.
We take a taxi downtown. It drives through a neighborhood of villas, on the other side of the Volksgarten. The houses, like private mansions, are still lovely. Romanian civil servants lived in them between the Wars, as did wealthy Jews. Now some of them are being renovated and serve as official buildings; others are very run down.
We get off at the Ringplatz and head towards the Theater Square nearby. We are meeting Felix Zuckermann and Mrs. Finkel in front of the Judische Haus. The Jews have reclaimed part of this house which belonged in its entirety to the community before World War II. The office today is the headquarters for the Czernowitz Jewish Culture Society, which is headed by Mrs. Finkel. A few years earner I had written to this Society but never received a reply. Did the letter really ever reach its destination?

Saturday, July 8

I realize I didn't describe yesterday's events, aside from a few sentences before our departure. I want to reconstruct the day now. We met Felix and Mrs. Finkel in front of the Judische Haus. Behind a prestigious facade, the building was used before the war as an administrative and religious center. Rooms were regularly rented out for cultural events that drew large crowds. The Soviets turned it into a house of culture and light industry, where they gave shows to entertain the workers. To avoid having to cope continuously with the ethnic origins of the building, they systematically sawed off the two points of all the stars of David that embellished the staircase. Since then the points have been restored but one of them still bears the scar of its ideological amputation.
Photo 1: Star of David "cut down" in the stair-well of the old "Jüdishes Haus". Photo F. Heymann

Marianne points out to me that Mrs. Ivgenia Finkel does not appear in any recent document on Czernowitz. In contrast to Lydia Hamik and Herr Zwilling, who have passed away, Joseph Burg and Rosa Roth, she has never been interviewed. We visit the house. The inside needs repairs. Here, like in the hotel lobby, people are seated, waiting for some undefined something. Photos of plays, in the Soviets style, decorate the landings. The room that was returned to the community is miniscule, and cluttered with of files. A metal cabinet apparently contains the precious archives of the Jewish museum that Frau Finkel would so like to create. She describes her plans, which seem very sketchy to us and above all out of proportion with respect to current and future financial and human means. I film our meeting. I say to myself that we could do so much for this place.

A walk through the city looking for family homes. The names of the streets have of course changed, but primarily the numbers. I have a few slim clues. Our house was on a corner. I remember a picture taken from the window of the apartment where you can see the house opposite. I think I recognize it in what used to be the Residenzgasse and which today is University Street, because the magnificent building, the headquarters of the Greek-Orthodox archbishopric which now houses the University. I am sure I have found the right place. I have a strange feeling of great familiarity. Bizarre for a place that has only existed in fantasy for me.

We go up with Felix. The first floor has been made into three apartments. No one answers the door on the left when we ring. In the middle there is a sort of storeroom, where we can hear voices. Felix doesn't try to enter. We follow his intuition. We ring on the door to the right and a Ukrainian woman in a pajama top answers. She is young – 35-40 maybe. Felix explains that my family used to live here before the war and that I want to visit the apartment. She shows no signs of distrust. No comparison with the images of closed-mouthed Poles, fearing the return of the Jews. She smiles: “Of course, come in!” “May I film and take pictures?” “Of course, no problem!”

The apartment, if it the right one, probably has little in common with the one where my father spent his childhood. In one room, a green porcelain gas burner is a recent one, according to Felix. In the other room, on the contrary, there is a much larger white porcelain stove that must be older. It must have been a wood burning or charcoal stove, turned into a gas heater. A doll's house, like a Barbie house, sits on top of it. The couple must have a little girl. The inlaid floor must also be old. The pinewood kitchen is clearly recent, but the view from the windows, aside from a few sheds with their sheet metal roofs, cannot have changed. The room has a wooden balcony

facing the inner courtyard. In the middle of the garden is the walnut tree that Martha[6] has told me about so often. I am convinced when I see it that this must be the family home. I realize afterwards that other similar courtyards can be found in almost each building and that walnut trees abound.

The Ukrainian furniture doesn’t prevent me from imagining another apartment, another staircase. What was in those niches, empty now? The Hershmanns were on the first floor, the Gutmans on the second, the attic on top. I imagine my father as a child, and then a young man in these rooms, coming home from school and going up the stairs two by two or four by four, his brother Leopold going down the stairs to meet his friends on the little square opposite the Temple or in one of the coffee houses on the Herrengasse. The Ukrainians who live here now invite me to come back, whenever I like, with the rest of my family. I thank them with the three words of Russian that I know and the two words in Ukrainian that I master. I feel both excited and appeased. Children are playing hoola hoop in the courtyard and wonder why this

---

[6] *Martha Blum, née Gutman, is my father's second cousin. She lived with her parents on the second floor of the same building. She has just published an autobiographical novel,* The Walnut Tree*. Toronto, Coteau Book, 1999.*

strange woman has come to film and photograph the house.
Walks in the rest of the city during the afternoon and then back to the hotel. I persuaded my traveling companions to go to Friday night services at the Orthodox synagogue. Mrs. Finkel said that there was another service – reform or conservative – and she looked surprised that we wanted to go to the Orthodox one.
Marianne is convinced that the operating synagogue must be in the Judengasse or the Shulgasse, where the ghetto was, but we wander the streets in vain without seeing anyone looking like a Jew going to a service. The great Schule is closed, like the Bethaus, two houses away. It looks renovated however and I would learn later that it contains magnificent muurals.
We eat in a Romanian inn. We have a delicious mamaliga with mushroom sauce and a large plate of black radishes. A group of young Romanians arrive. The frontier is 40 km away and they come to spend the evening in the Ukraine. They also do some shopping.
In the Herrengasse, where the restaurant is located, the grocery stores stay open until eleven at night. In all the restaurants, there is music, disco or more traditional, and in general it is turned up a little when we arrive, in our honor. This also happens each time we get into a taxi. When we leave, the owner tries to detain us a little longer. He kisses the ladies' hands.
Photo 2: The elegant girls of the Herrengasse. Photo F. Heymann

Back at the hotel. A quick trip to the discotheque. Once more I am fascinated by the dresses worn by the often ravishing young women there. The evening dresses and high heels would be perfect for opening night at the Opera, and the several short-shorts clearly show that we are not in a Moslem country. In fact, the female population can be divided into two groups: young women with clothes and hairstyles that are the latest rage in Europe, and the Babushkas in their tattered clothes, with their white or multicolored head scarves knotted tighly around their heads. The transition from one species to the other appears to be fairly abrupt.
This morning we met Felix on Austria-Platz; Marianne told the driver where we wanted to go in Ukrainian. We realize that he is headed in a completely different direction than the familiar route downtown. Marianne had made a mistake, and given him the name of a village on the Romanian border. Rectification. The driver turns around and we find ourselves once again on the familiar route past the Volkagarten and the villa neighborhood, and finally get to our rendezvous: the end of a square, an enormous statue commemorating the “Soviet Heroes”

who liberated the city from the Nazis in 1944.
Felix arrives, elegant as always. The memory of the city's eras, he makes it easy for us to meet people. I don't know what we would do without him. We head towards the high schools: first the liceu real orthodox and then the German Lycee. We get to the first building, on the side of the Greek-Orthodox cathedral, recently repainted in a “lovely” shade of cotton-candy pink.
It is a large high school. The door on the street side is locked for vacation. We go through the courtyard. The superintendent asks us what we want. Felix explains and he lets us in right away. Felix says that this was the old German Lycee. According to what my father told me about its location, I would have thought it was the liceu real orthodox, but I trust my guide. We go into one of the rooms, today the staff room. Maybe my father sat there once too. For in fact, my intuition and my information were correct. The building was indeed the real orthodox and not the German Lycee. We then visit the German Lycee, located on the next corner. It is a somewhat smaller building. Marianne's and David's parents studied there. The people we meet all shout “Americans! Americans!” But no one seems distrustful or afraid of anything about our visit.
At eleven o'clock we have a meeting with Josef Burg, a Yiddish writer. He was born in Wishnitz, where 98 % of the inhabitants spoke Yiddish. I am somewhat apprehensive about the the fact that he is a “star” figure of Czernowitz today. He lives in the Landhausgasse, that under Soviet rule became the Schors, named for a Ukrainian politician. Today it is Scheptinski street, after a Ukrainian cardinal. Josef Burg was born in 1912. He is one of the last writers in Eastern Europe who still writes in Yiddish in the tradition of Itzig Manger or Eliezer Steinbarg. The new society for Yiddish culture which he directs is named for Steinbarg. His picture, next to Sholem Aleikhem, facing the portrait of Franz-Joseph hang on the walls in the room where we meet. In fact the meeting is fascinating. Josef Burg tells us the story of his geographic and intellectual peregrinations, which ends with the sad but cutting observation: “Today the Jews can do everything but it's too late!” He reads two of his latest texts on biblical themes, first in German translation and then in Yiddish. The first text is about the sacrifice of Isaac, the second about Ruth the Moabite.
Photo 3: The Emperor Franz-Joseph and the Empress Sissi on the bookcase of Rose Roth-Zuckermann. Photo F. Heymann

As in the home of Rosa Roth Zuckerman, there are busts of Franz-Joseph. Does this

superposition of eras correspond to a deep-seated identity, some kind of folklore, an “over”-identity? On another wall, to the right of a large porcelain stove on which is standing a candlestick in the shape of a magen david, are paintings with Jewish themes, family photographs and above all his own portraits.
We go back through the Residenzgasse. I find our house again, which has become my landmark. We go up Dreifaltigkeits gasse where Marianne's mother's apartment was located. We meet the current occupant on the comer. She recognizes Marianne and waves to her. A little later, I ask Felix whether the people own or rent their apartments. Several years ago the apartments were “privatized”; people who had lived in them for a certain number of years were given their apartments free of charge. I couldn't help thinking that a good number of these apartments had not cost the State much since the Jews living in them had fled from one day to the next.
We get to Lehmstrasse, where Felix's house is. Like many other streets, it is paved; on either side there are trees, chestnut or acacias, and small houses surrounded by little gardens. Marina, Felix's Ukranian wife, gives us a warm welcome. She is blond “very blond”, with a wide-set face; her eyes and lips carefully made up. The house is old and the furniture is in no particular style. Several ethnically “neutral” knickknacks. I interview Felix. The story is amazing. He tells us all about the Soviet and post-Soviet period.
Communicating with Marina is very difficult. The language barrier makes us a little tongue-tied. She knows bits of German and a few words in English. We mostly smile expansively at each other.
Tomorrow our plan is to walk around the town in the morning and then go to the cemetery in the afternoon. I don't know whether I will have time to go to Sadagura, the birthplace of the Ruzhyner Hassidic dynasty. In any case, this trip has given an extraordinary depth to the work I have been doing all these years on the city. I know now that I will come back... I have the impression that I owe a great deal to Marianne and Leo. I feel very attached to this couple who I in fact still hardly know. It's nice to speak Hebrew with David. He often teases me about my being a schickse frum, which in Yiddish literally means a “non-Jewish Orthodox”.
Czernowitz has now become a place where I can conjugate the verb “to live” in the present tense. Up to now I hardly ever used it in my work. Naturally the Chernivitzians of the year 2001 have nothing in common with “my” Chernivitzians. But the places are there and their evocative pull is strong. With an intensity of feeling that even disturbs me, I really have the feeling that part of me belongs to this city. There are only a handful of “authentic Czemowitzians” left, who are now between 88 and 92 years old. Are they the last – Frau Zuckermann, Frau Finkel, Herr Burg – or is it Marianne, David, Felix and me...
It is late. The hotel discotheque blasts its techno music under my windows.

Sunday, July 9

Today the visit to the cemetery at the beginning of the afternoon kindled such strong emotions that I have some trouble reconstructing what happened beforehand.
Now I remember: we went to Postgasse. I wanted to see the post office because apparently my grandfather was the postmaster. The building is being renovated and scaffolding hides part of the facade. Inside, the imposing crystal chandeliers must date back to the Austro-Hungarian Empire.
Afterwards, we looked for David's grandparents' house in Piteygasse, David was able to visit the apartment that is currently being occupied by three young men. Then we went to the ghetto, or rather what Marianne calls the “enlarged ghetto”. Apparently in October 1941, the authorities realized after a few days that it was impossible to squeeze everyone into the perimeter of three or four streets that delimited the original ghetto and it was then made bigger. Marianne found her uncle's house where 25 people crowded in. Marianne's parents,

who at that time were engaged, were married there. They went outside the house, Marianne tells, found a rabbi and asked him: “Can you marry us?” It was Friday afternoon and the rabbi said no. So they got married at the Town hall. This is exactly the way Marianne relates the events.
We then met Felix in front of the Kinagoga and took a taxi to the Jewish cemetery. It is immense and in a piteous state. Nothing is tended. A building, today completely dilapidated, ihust have been used for fimeral orations. Inside, the names of community figures is engraved on a stone slab. David looks for the tomb of his grandfather. He has seen a picture that showed the name on a large black marble tombstone just behind it. He finds it quickly, he rips the weeds off the tombstone of David Kessler, rabbi of the community at the turn of the century. Without the picture, he never would have found it, because it is very small. He copies the inscription. Before coming, Marianne had done research to locate the plot where her grandfather must be. I assume that the graves of my great grandparents, the Herschmanns, must be here. My great grandmother Feuer died in Nice the year I was born and I know that her husband was from Stanislavov, so I don’t know where he is buried. I am not looking for anything in particular. I wander around the gravestones. Almost every name makes me think of someone and their story.
What surprises me is the mixture of tombstone styles and eras. Very old gravestones, with Hebrew inscriptions, lie next to tombstones from the interwar period where German and Hebrew both appear – there is absolutely no Romanian – then recent tombstones with Ukrainian or Russian inscriptions, I can't tell the difference. Each period produced a clearly differentiated style of tombstones.
I head off in one direction and quickly head back. I go off in towards the other side. I take a few steps and then suddenly, the grave of Leib Herschmann. The stele is made of black marble and is very high; the inscription is in German and Hebrew. Apparently he was an important figure in the community, the list of his titles finishes with an etc. The tombstone is overgrown with brambles. Suddenly I realize that the tomb has a rusted iron fence around it. There is a second grave. The second tombstone is covered with weeds. David and Leo start to pull the weeds off and we discover the tomb of Ettel Herschmann, his wife, a tiny tombstone, with her name beginning to wear off, and the date of death, 1945. At first I'm surprised, but I then understand why the tombstones are so different in size. In 1945 there were no members of the family left in the city. The plot existed and the gravesite was reserved but the tombstone could not be as fancy as the one for her husband who died in 1912.
Drizzle starts to fall on this two-fold place of death. Only an old woman and a young, strangely ugly boy follow us.
We end the afternoon at Rosa Roth Zuckennann's house. There I look through her collection of old post cards. One of the cards shows the Residenzgasse, “our” house, as it was at the time. I then realize why the address was 2a. At the beginning of the street there was a one-story house, a space, and then our house. Since then a third house has been built between them.
Tonight we meet Helmut Kusdat, a Viennese fan of the city, Amy Colin, an American researcher who specializes in the Bukovinian poets of the interwar period, and Peter Rychio, at the Hutsul tavern. Peter Rychio is an amazing person. A Ukrainian who holds the German chair at the University, he translates Celan, Rose Auslander and the Bukovinian and Ukrainian Jewish poets and has become the specialist of Jewish Bukovina. Marianne provides me with the key to the mystery: a child from the countryside, he was adopted by Lydia Harnik, who raised him in the cult of the German culture. Lydia Harnik died three years ago. She was one of the last “Czernowitzians.”
We return to the hotel where Marianne and Leo interview me again. I try to make a first attempt at summarizing everything I have experienced in these four days. A voyage of

initiation. The impact was stronger than I had expected. My familiarity with the city as well.

Monday, July 10

I can hardly believe that only four days have gone by since I arrived in Czernowitz. I have the feeling I have lived through an entire life story. A painful feeling as well to have met the last survivors of the former community, while the memories are so fresh in my mind. Can a book bring a place back to life? I feel I have absorbed the sights, the sounds, the smells and the emotions garnered here.

Austria-Platz. The archives are housed in the Jesuiten-Kirche. A winding staircase. The archivist who helps me can speak some German. Obviously they will not open the files for me. I need to fill in a request with the name and the date of birth of the individuals whose records I am interested in. In the flurry of our last day here, I forget dates of birth and I make a mistake on a first name. So I am not sure I will be sent anything concrete in Jerusalem. What is kept here are the ghetto archives. But in fact maybe my grandparents were not deported from the ghetto but directly from their apartment on Residenzgasse, like Paul Celan's parents. If she finds something, she will write.

The official registrar is somewhere else, in the Kobylanskaya-Herrengasse, number 33. We go there. On the way I photograph Celan's house on Masarykgasse (he was born on Wassilkogasse). Leaving the archives, I notice a bulletin board with documents on city figures, a photo of Celan and a report card (not very good in French!). The bulletin board, that normally does not attract anyone's attention, starts to elicit a great deal of interest from passer'bys. Why are these foreigners so interested? Suddenly several people come to read it.

I am meeting the driver in the hotel lobby. I go back to Lvov. The route is beautiful. Outside the city, we stop on the bridge which crosses the Prut to take my last pictures and I find Rose Auslander “Immer zuriick zum Pruth”

The pebbles began singing in the Prut/ Sculpting fleeting motifs in the sun/ Narcissus, we floated on the mirror of thel water/ Embracing ourselves/ Night, covered by the wind/ the riverbed overflowing with fish/ the moon, goldfish/ a rustle of side curls – It's the Rabbi in his kaftan and shawl, surrounded by hassidimi/

looking/ birds whose names we do not know/ Your cries attract and frighten at the same time/ But we are ready to follow you beyond the cornfields and the swaying synagogues. Always returning to the Prut/Rafts of wood or carob, flowing down the Prut,/ where are you going in such a hurry, leaving us alone here with the pebbles?

On the way we don't talk much. The extent of Mikhaijlo's English is about ten words and my Ukrainian vocabulary is about six. He takes me through lovely places, stops at the Jewish monuments. At one point he doesn't take the road to Lvov. I have a few seconds of ahxiety. But he only wants to take a nicer road than the more direct one. The landscapes of Galicia are even lovelier than the ones in Bukovina, hillier. We get to Lvov at six p.m.

Tuesday, July 11

While waiting to board the Ukrainian Airlines plane, I chat with an Austrian who is doing humanitarian work in the area. “It's a magnificent country!” I say, enthusiastic. “It's only a facade, the country is in ruins” he answers.

Florence Heymann
CRFJ